

## **PRAYER FOR A WOMAN WHEN SHE HAS MISCARRIED/ABORTED AN INFANT**

At the conclusion of the *forty* days of purification, which is after the unfortunate occurrence, the woman comes to the church and stands by the western doors.

*The Priest*, having put on the Epitrachclion, goes out to the woman who has come, and *begins*:

Blessed is our God, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

*Reader*: Amen, and the Trisagion. After the Exclamation the Dismissal Troparion of the Day. Then:

Let us pray to the Lord. / Lord, have mercy.

O Master, Lord our God, Who wast born of the holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and, as an infant wast laid in a manger: Do Thou Thyself, according to Thy great mercy, have mercy on this Thy handmaid who today is in sins, having fallen into *the killing of a person*, whether voluntary or involuntary, and has cast out that conceived in her. And forgive her iniquities, whether voluntary or involuntary, and preserve her from every diabolical snare, and cleanse *her* defilement, heal *her* suffering, and grant unto her health and strength of body of soul, O Lover of Mankind; and guard her with a shining Angel from every assault of invisible demons; yea, O Lord, from sickness and weakness. And cleanse her from bodily defilement and from diverse inward travail befalling her; and, by Thine abundant mercy, rouse her humbled body, and raise her up from the bed on which she lies. For we have been given birth in sins and in transgressions, and all are unclean before Thee, O Lord. And with fear we cry and say, "Look down from Heaven and behold the helplessness of us who are condemned, and forgive this Thy handmaid, *N.*, who is in sins, having fallen into *the killing of a person*, whether voluntary or involuntary, and has cast out that conceived in her. And, according to Thy great mercy, as the Good God and the Lover of Mankind, have mercy on her and forgive her in all things that have encompassed her and have come in contact with her, for Thou alone hast power to forgive sins and transgressions, through the prayers of Thy most-pure Mother, and all the Saints.

For unto Thee are due all glory, honor and worship, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.\*

*And the Dismissal is made.*

The Church strictly differentiates between the causes of unfortunate occurrences for which the *above* Prayer has been composed, whether the unfortunate occurrence took place according to the will of the woman who had

become pregnant, or independently of her will. The first it calls **voluntary murder** and the second **involuntary murder**. (For, whether this be “voluntary” or “involuntary”, the killing of a person, hence “murder”, has occurred.)

The Church also treats with discernment the time “when a woman aborts”, viewing the case of abortion/miscarriage as not of the same significance if it took place during the first half of pregnancy (unless this was the fault only of the woman who had become pregnant); the Church attaches greater importance to cases which took place during the second half of pregnancy, even when the miscarriage/abortion was not premeditated on the part of the one who was pregnant: “Since they that are five months pregnant are, by the laws and canons, responsible for murder if it happen that by any shock they abort the infant” (quoted in the *Book of Needs* after the conclusion of the *Prayer at the Naming of the Child on the Eighth Day*).

Prior to reading the Prayer, the Priest must examine the woman who has had a miscarriage/abortion, to determine whether she caused it by inadvertence or on purpose, as the result of poison, etc. In either case, he must lead her to repentance, and set a penance in conformity with the holy canons—for inadvertence, as the instrument of an involuntary death, and for premeditated abortion, as a voluntary murderess.

The Council of Ancyra puts harlots who have corrupted and destroyed their children under prohibition from the Holy Mysteries *for ten years*. It also commands that those persons who provide others with means of destroying or ejecting the fetus be subject to the same punishment.

When the woman casts out the fetus involuntarily, or if it happens manifestly “from the slander of the adversary (i.e., the devil), the parents are considered as being not guilty of murder. Besides, even though this case is worthy of mercy, it does require some kind of penance, for the consoling of the conscience of the woman who has miscarried.